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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed grave concern over the latest outbreak of sectarian religious violence on Christmas Day in Nigeria and renewed its call for the Nigerian government to investigate, prosecute, and punish such crimes and those responsible for them. According to news reports and statements from the Government of Nigeria, the recent violence included Christmas Day explosions at Christian churches in five cities in central and northeastern Nigeria-- Jos, Kano, Madalla, Gadaka, and Damaturu--leaving at least 39 dead and 65 wounded. Muslim militants from the extremist organization Boko Haram have claimed responsibility for the bombings, making this the second Christmas season in a row that Boko Haram has attacked Christian houses of worship in Nigeria.

“The Commission condemns the unconscionable and senseless Christmas Day attacks on innocent worshippers in Nigeria,” said USCIRF Chairman [Leonard Leo](#). “Nigeria must come to grips with these kinds of attacks at or around Christian celebrations, and find appropriate ways to prevent them. But that isn’t enough. Nigeria’s government needs to bring all perpetrators of sectarian violence to justice, from this Christmas and the last. To date, the government has failed to address fully the culture of impunity surrounding the ongoing violence, which is why, for the past two years, USCIRF has recommended that Nigeria be officially designated a country of particular concern.”

This past spring, USCIRF had commended the government of Nigeria for having instituted, for the first time in over 10 years of sectarian clashes, 41 prosecutions against some of the perpetrators of violence that occurred in and around Jos in early 2010. But there has been limited progress in seeing these prosecutions to a conclusion. “It’s most unfortunate, but far

from surprising, that sectarian violence would continue unabated in light of the fact that, time and again, the Nigerian government has signaled that there may be no cost to such lawlessness,” Mr. Leo observed. “If Nigeria wants to keep extremism from its communities, then it needs to get serious about combating impunity.”

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

View the most recent findings and recommendations of the Commission on combating privately-driven sectarian violence in Nigeria at <http://uscirf.gov/images/ar2011/nigeria2011.pdf>

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